

ABC WORLD NEWS TONIGHT

22 January 1985

AP09>SPACE SHUTTLE>JENNINGS: Sometime tomorrow afternoon, the space shuttle is going to lift off from Cape Canaveral again. We do not know the exact time, and the space agency is not announcing it. Why? Because this is a purely military mission and what the shuttle is carrying is classified. ABC's Lynn Sherr has been on special assignment.

SHERR: From the beginning, the American space effort was so open, even our failures happened in full view of the world. We watched as it happened, not only on Earth, but on the moon and in between, riding along with the astronauts as they traveled into the future. VOICE OF UNIDENTIFIED ASTRONAUT: I don't know if I like having a million people looking over my shoulder.

SHERR: That's the way it was intended by President Eisenhower, who insisted that NASA's charter emphasize the peaceful purposes of space. But while NASA was created as a civilian agency, the military role in space was early acknowledged. Army research provided the rockets for the first manned space flights. And President Kennedy, by focusing on the challenge to American prestige, turned space, the race to the moon, into an instrument of foreign policy. With the space shuttle, NASA became even more dependant on the military. Faced with a shrinking budget and an apathetic public, NASA agreed to modify its newest space plane to carry Defense Department cargos, thus guaranteeing a steady paying customer. And it was only the flexibility of the shuttle in deploying intelligence gathering satellites that saved it from President Carter's budget axe. DAVID AARON (former national security adviser): We can do things with the shuttle we could not do any other way. The president was convinced not to kill the program because he wanted the kinds of national security capabilities the shuttle could provide.

SHERR: Until now, intelligence satellites have been launched on unmanned rockets, like weather and communication satellites. But the information from spy satellites goes to classified collection points on Earth. They've heard conversations between Soviet leaders in their limousines and read markings on submarines and airplane wings. They've transmitted live pictures of enemy targets and detected new Soviet missile technology. And they've become vital for verifying arms control agreements. This nation's spy satellites are managed by a

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secret government agency called the National Reconnaissance Office, so secret the government won't admit it exists. And despite strict security, it has been widely reported that tomorrow, for the first time, an NRO satellite will be launched on the space shuttle.

JAMES BAMFORD (intelligence expert): So you have this enormous conflict where you have the most secret organization within the intelligence community, the National Reconnaissance Office, pretty much joining forces with the most public organization in the federal government. And the two don't mix.

SHERR: That's why this time, in accord with Defense Department demands, the familiar symbols of space trips will be gone. There will be no countdown clock, no press conferences, no air-to-ground audio from space and no space TV. In the future, there will be even less. Although the military is scheduled for only about a third of all shuttle flights over the next five years, they're building their own launch pad at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, where they will treat future shuttle launches with the same secrecy as unmanned rockets, not even announcing flight dates. And with the military's space budget approaching \$11 billion this year, nearly twice as large as NASA's, these activities may just be beginning. NASA is already working with the Defense Department on several projects that bear on military uses of space. And although the so-called 'Star Wars' program is still in the research phase, a space defense system could some day be launched on the shuttle.

MAJ. GEN. JOHN STORRIE (U.S. Air Force): Yeah, I think you'd have to have your head stuck in the sand to say, 'Well, gee, we're never going to use the shuttle to put weapons up there.' If the time comes in the interest of national security that we need to employ weapons in space, I'm sure we would use whatever vehicles we had to put them up there. And that does not preclude the shuttle.

SHERR: That is not the peaceful goal originally set for NASA. But keep in mind that the Pentagon's use of space is not new. It's just that the controversy has become more public, now that the military will be a regular presence on a civilian space shuttle. Lynn Sherr, ABC news, at the Kennedy Space Center in Florida.